

Networking, Communication, and Balance: Key Advice from Female Flag Officers

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Commander, Naval Surface Forces Pacific hosted a flag officer-led Female Forum Tuesday, Aug. 21, as a supplement to the Surface Warfare Flag Officer Training Symposium held last week.

Leading the panel were Vice Adm. Mary Jackson, Vice Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti, and Rear Adm. Yvette M. Davids. Jackson serves as Commander, Naval Installation Command. Franchetti currently serves as Commander, U.S. 6th Fleet, and Deputy Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa. Rear Adm. Davids is the Senior Military Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs.

During the panel, the flag officers offered insight into work-family balance, their motivation to continue serving, and what their experiences were like as trail blazers as women – and in some cases, as ethnic minorities as well.



Master-at-Arms 3rd Class Alyssa Gray explains the entry control point access list to Vice Adm. Mary Jackson, Commander Navy Installations Command, during an assessment of U.S. Navy Support Facility (NSF) Diego Garcia.

With regard to work-family balance, all panel members agreed that a successful career in the Navy required upfront communication with one’s spouse or partner, as well as with the detailer.

“I think talking about it is really important, and you’d be surprised how many different options there are to kind of re-wicker and re-navigate [so] you’re on track,” said Jackson. She also added that since she entered the Navy, she’s seen the culture shift from one where it was taboo to speak about family planning to detailers, to one where that sort of discussion is welcomed.

The group continued the conversation into what the flag officers’ considered the motivation to continue serving. For most, the decision to stay in was a constant analysis through the years. Inputs were taken from family members, friends, coworkers, and their commands. It was about being mindful of the balance between what was best for them and what was best for their family. Nearly all women admitted that at some point in their career, they seriously considered leaving the service to pursue other opportunities, but ultimately found they were happiest when serving.



Vice. Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti, commander, U.S. 6th Fleet and commander, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) speaks with sailors while visiting the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Bainbridge (DDG 96), during exercise Baltic Operations June 10, 2018.

The dialogue led into a discussion about how to successfully navigate a career path in the Navy while still being a mother and a spouse.

“You need a support network. You have to figure out who your allies are and what your support network is,” said Jackson, before emphasizing, “You’re going to have allies and they’re not going to look like you, and they’re may not behave like you, and you’ll kind of figure that out over time. So embrace that, and work together.”

She went on to recommend the Women’s Leadership Symposium and Women’s Lean In Circles; two examples of women-specific support networking opportunities currently in place in the Navy.

“Sometimes as minorities, we kind of delete ourselves, or we subtract ourselves from the table sometimes. We don’t step up, because we think we’re different, and we think everyone’s looking at us differently. But in reality, they’re not necessarily looking at us differently,” said Franchetti. She went on to say, “Like Admiral Davids said, if you’re striving for excellence, you’re doing your best, you learn everything you can to do your job, you’re being a team player – that’s what we do in the Navy.”



Then-Capt. Yoette M. Davids, commanding officer of guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill (CG 52), uses a sound-powered telephone to communicate with the ship's master for Military Sealift Command's USNS Richard E. Byrd (T-AKE 4). Rear Adm. Davids now serves as the senior military adviser to the assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs in Washington, D.C.

The Female Forum provided approximately 100 women, serving in sea and shore billets at almost every paygrade, the opportunity to directly interact with some of the Navy's most senior female leadership. This forum took place in the week leading to Women's Equality Day, Sunday Aug. 26., which commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment, when women across America were granted the equal right to vote.

Many women holding senior positions in the U.S. Navy today joined at a time when the environment for women to serve was a very different thing. In the 1970s, a series of naval policy changes allowed women to fill a significantly wider array of job assignments and paved the way for female trailblazers to shape today's diversity across the Fleet. As the leaders of Female Forum noted, women have come far in the last century with regards to integrating into nearly all the billets in the Navy.

Thank you to all the women who have committed so much time and effort into serving the United States of America and the Navy, and through their service, made a truly significant impact on the lives of all Sailors.

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